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## Catrina's Corner

Catrina Blair Small Business Advocate



## Forward Ho! High-Speed Rail Work is on the Move

With no concrete end in sight for the COVID-19 pandemic, the high-speed rail program joins the rest of the world hoping for and working toward a better tomorrow.

Governor Newsom's declaration that our construction is essential has kept small businesses and construction crews working during these unprecedented times. You may be surprised to learn that we've reached some important milestones since the coronavirus turned everything upside down seven months ago.

Last month, the California High-Speed Rail Authority and the City of Selma joined forces for the **grand opening** of the **Central Valley Training Center in Selma**. Authority Board member Henry Perea was on hand to welcome the first cohort of students who hope to work on the high-speed rail project. The program's main focus is training veterans, people of color and low-income adults.

"Now, we're closing in on a total of 4,600 jobs created in the Central Valley."

Catrina Blair  
Small Business Advocate  
California High-Speed Rail Authority

# Investing in California Small Businesses

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## Catrina's Corner

Catrina Blair Small Business Advocate



On Labor Day, we cheered when we learned an [average of 1,100 workers a day](#) are being dispatched to 32 construction sites along the first 119 miles of the project. Now, we're closing in on a total of 4,600 jobs created in the Central Valley.

The good job news doesn't stop there. The first high-speed rail structure has been completed in Kern County. Crews finished the [Poso Creek Viaduct](#) last month. Located west of State Route 43 just north of the City of Wasco, it will carry high-speed rail trains over Poso Creek. Since August, workers have also completed three overpasses in Madera County. [Avenue 15](#), located between State Route 99 and Road 32, will take traffic over existing BNSF tracks and the future high-speed rail system. Not far away, cars and trucks will be able to use [Avenue 10](#) to cross over high-speed rail tracks along with the [Avenue 7](#) overpass which opened to traffic last month. These grade separations will prevent cars and

trucks from idling and releasing greenhouse emissions while waiting on trains to pass.

The Business Advisory Council (BAC) went high-tech and held its first virtual meeting on Zoom in August. BAC members joined in from around the state. We heard from small business liaisons for the three design-builders constructing high-speed rail along with WSP, our Rail Delivery Partner, and DB Engineering, the Early Train Operator. They talked about ongoing and upcoming contracts and small business opportunities. One of the highlights was a presentation by Bjorn Nilsen with Dragados Flatiron Joint Venture. We got quite a laugh when he was joined by his 13-year-old Solomon Islands Eclectus parrot, Riley. Nilsen ignored the bird who did his best to capture attention by flapping his wings, tugging Nilsen's clothes and walking on him. Nilsen said Riley believes he's an office manager and is very good at indicating what he wants.

Finally, don't forget Veterans Day, which



In September, high-speed rail design-builder Tutor Perini/Zachry/Parsons opened the Avenue 10 overpass in Madera County. It's located between State Route 99 and Road 32 and will carry vehicle traffic over future high-speed rail tracks. The bridge will prevent cars and trucks from idling and releasing greenhouse gas emissions while waiting on trains to pass.

### Small Business Program

The Authority is committed to small businesses playing a major role in building the statewide high-speed rail system. The Small Business Program has an aggressive 30 percent goal for small business participation including Disadvantaged Business Enterprises (DBEs), Disabled Veteran Business Enterprises (DVBEs) and Micro-Businesses (MBs).

falls on November 11. The Small Business Newsletter is giving a special salute to the men and women who have served our country and spent time in the military. Currently, out of 570 Small Businesses (SBs), we have 60 Disabled Veteran Business Enterprises (DVBEs) on the high-speed rail project. You can read about three of them in this edition. U.S. Army veteran Joe Valverde owns Valverde Construction, which has worked on our project for more than seven years. Former Army platoon leader Brian Ross brought his military training to Ross Infrastructure, a firm that helps us with funding and finance. The same holds true for former Marine Erik Holquin. He owns EM Link International which has helped us host successful virtual meetings online since the COVID-19 shutdown began.

We hope you enjoy this latest edition of the Small Business Newsletter. It shows we're moving up as we build bridges, viaducts and overpasses. We're moving out as we connect those structures to each other. Most of all, we're moving forward with the quest to bring high-speed rail to California and enable us to get where we're going in a safe, speedy and sustainable manner that can't get here soon enough.

Catrina Blair



**1.** In August, the Authority opened the Avenue 15 grade separation in Madera County. It will allow traffic to travel over existing BNSF tracks and future high-speed rail trains.

**2.** Business Advisory Council (BAC) members tuned in when the BAC held its first virtual meeting on Zoom. Staff discussed the increasing numbers of jobs created for construction workers and small businesses.

**3.** Riley the Solomon Islands Eclectus parrot got some face time during the BAC meeting online when he joined Dragados Flatiron Small Business Liaison Bjorn Nilsen. Riley strutted his stuff as Nilsen talked about current construction work and upcoming small business opportunities in the Central Valley.

**4.** The California High-Speed Rail Authority Board members were briefed on the successful opening of the new Central Valley Training Center in Selma. Last month, the students started taking classes that will provide them with skills to work on the high-speed rail project.

# Small Business Events



**November 10, 2020**  
**[Business Recovery: The Role of Innovation During COVID-19](#)**

9:00 AM – 10:00 AM  
Online Webinar  
High-tech startup entrepreneur and Shasta-Cascade Small Business Development Center (SBDC) Director David Walker will talk about innovation and changes that may help your business thrive during the COVID-19 pandemic. David Castaneda from the Sacramento Small Business Administration (SBA) Office will also give an update on business assistance and funding that can help your business rebound. This is the fourth installment of a series of free webinars on business recovery.



**November 18, 2020**  
**[Government Contracting & Bid Protest: Back to Basics](#)**

10:00 AM – 11:30 AM  
Online Webinar  
Get the nuts and bolts of competitive bidding on government contracts, how to deal with bid protests and common pitfalls. This free webinar will feature experts from Manatt, Phelps & Phillips, LLP, who will help small businesses understand procurement and contract execution from start to finish. The event will be hosted by the Norcal Procurement Technical Assistance Center (PTAC), Manatt, Phelps & Phillips, LLP in collaboration with the Northern California Small Business Development Center (SBDC).

## Upcoming Events

**November 10, 2020**  
**Business Advisory Council**  
1:00 PM – 4:00 PM  
Webcast Meeting Online

**December 10, 2020**  
**California High-Speed Rail Authority Board Meeting**  
Time: TBD  
Webcast Meeting Online

**November 19, 2020**  
**California High-Speed Rail Authority Board Meeting**  
1:30 pm  
Webcast Meeting Online



**December 1 – 4, 2020**  
**[How to Access Capital for Your Business](#)**

9:00 AM – 11:00 AM  
Webcast Meeting Online  
Strapped for cash? Find out how to start or expand your business with financial help from the [California Capital Financial Development Corporation](#) or the Small Business Administration. You'll learn what makes a borrower attractive to a lender and mistakes to avoid when applying for a loan. Hosted by the California Capital Women's Business Center.



**December 16, 2020**  
**[Acquisition.gov](#)**

9:00 AM – 10:30 AM  
Webcast Meeting Online  
Join this workshop to find out about upcoming federal contracting opportunities. The instructor will focus on access to the Federal Acquisition Regulation and agency Procurement Forecast. Hosted by the [California Capital Procurement Technical Assistance Center \(PTAC\)](#).

## Did You Know?

The Authority has identified and environmentally cleared a site for a [Maintenance of Way Facility in Fresno](#). The site, located just south of downtown Fresno, would maintain tracks and signals, infrastructure, overhead lines, rail right-of-way, fare collection systems and cleaning vehicles and train stations. The site would also contain the Operational Control Center, a temporary trainset acceptance and testing facility, training classrooms and support equipment such as simulators. The Authority's Central Valley staff are working with Authority Board Member Henry Perea and business and government representatives known as Fresno Works to secure the site and preserve a \$25 million local investment. It will be used for infrastructure improvements and readying the site for future jobs. The Track and Systems contractor that we're currently in the process of procuring will be tasked with constructing the proposed maintenance facility.



**Antelope Valley Transit Authority Electric Buses:** [The Antelope Valley Transit Authority \(AVTA\)](#) recently reached a new milestone with its electric bus fleet traveling a whopping 3 million miles. Board Chairman Marvin Crist said the achievement reduced CO<sub>2</sub> by 18.2 million pounds and saving more than 43 thousand pounds of particulate matter from spewing into the air. The California State Transportation Agency (CalSTA) has awarded AVTA multiple grants as part of the Transit and Intercity Rail Program. AVTA is the first transit agency in the nation to nearly reach the goal of a full electric bus fleet, a plan initiated in 2016. (Photo courtesy of AVTA)

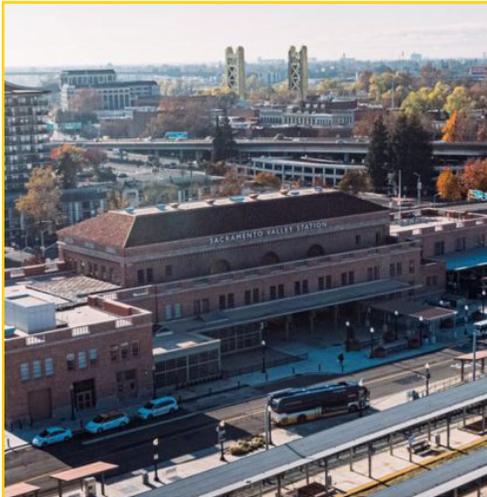
**City of Ceres Awaits Alamont Corridor Express:** The City of Ceres is optimistic about the [Altamont Corridor Express \(ACE\) expansion reaching the city](#) by the target date of 2022. With funding support from SB1 dollars through the Transit and Intercity Rail Program, the City continues to work with the San Joaquin Regional Rail Commission on station planning and development. This is part of a larger rail expansion plan that will extend the ACE train into the Central Valley with stations in Modesto, Ceres, Turlock and eventually connecting to high-speed rail in Merced by 2026.

(Photo courtesy of ACE)



**Sacramento Valley Station and Railyards:** A \$3.4 million grant is giving a big boost to the the [Sacramento Valley Station and the new Railyards Plaza community development](#). Officials said the project will be a transit-oriented development with residential units, a major league soccer stadium, medical campus, flexible mixed use and open space. The California State Transportation Agency awarded the money that's part of the Transit and Intercity Rail Capital Program to the Capitol Corridor Joint Powers Authority. The project, slated for competition by 2022, is a collaborative effort between the City of Sacramento, Sacramento Regional Transit and Downtown Railyards Venture.

(Photo courtesy of City of Sacramento)



# How Military Experience Helps Shape Brian Ross' Business Acumen

Brian Ross spent eight years in the U.S. Army serving as a platoon leader for an engineering unit. A year of that time was done in Afghanistan working on route clearance, searching for Improvised Explosive Devices and overseeing base construction in the country's most forsaken regions.

"As an engineering unit, we weren't going around kicking in doors and looking for insurgents," Ross recalled. "But we were exposed to a lot of attacks and a lot of threats on a regular basis. It was scary and stressful at times. As a platoon leader, I was responsible for the health and welfare of 50-plus soldiers."

As Ross reflected on his time in the Army – particularly his tour in Afghanistan and his responsibilities – he has an interminable appreciation for how the experience shaped his perspective. In 2017, he launched [Ross Infrastructure Development LLC](#), a San Francisco-based Disabled Veteran Business

"Ross Infrastructure is my primary business. It's difficult to manage the current clients versus the opportunities with a start-up like InfraShares. On a day-by-day basis, I have to sit down each morning and prioritize what I'm going to get done."

**Brian Ross**  
Owner

Ross Infrastructure Development LLC



Enterprise (DVBE) that is presently supporting KPMG in its financial advisory engagement and oversight role for the California High-Speed Rail Authority.

"It was a huge growth experience, learning about managing a lot of different responsibilities and managing stress and adversity," Ross said as he assessed his time in the Army and how it relates to his drive to form his own company.

"A lot of the same things, just being organizationally disciplined and being able to talk to people from the lowest rank in your company and to executives who are your clients," Ross added. "Just the motivation to take on something that is challenging and risky."

Like many newly minted start-ups, the biggest challenge is maintaining a steady positive cash flow. And this was also the case with Ross Infrastructure in the initial months of operation.

"It's a challenge managing the lumpy cash flow of running a consulting business." Said Ross, who received a Bronze Star and was named Engineer Platoon Leader of the Year in 2011. "Initially, I went four months without getting my first payment. At that time, I was living off savings and credit cards and racked up a pretty healthy debt and credit card load. At the time, it was stressful. I was right on the



**1.** In 2017, Brian Ross launched Ross Infrastructure Development in San Francisco. The Disabled Veteran Business Enterprise helps advise the California High-Speed Rail Authority on funding and financing. (Photo courtesy of [Winni Wintermeyer](#))



**2. & 3.** Before he became an entrepreneur, Brian Ross spent eight years as an Army platoon leader for an engineering unit. His military experience taught him how to be organized and talk to people regardless of their rank.

edge of collapse for a couple of months.

“But then once the client checks started rolling in, it got better.”

So much so that Ross was able to set his sights on another business venture: [InfraShares](#), an online crowdfunding platform designed to raise capital for Smart City technologies and infrastructure projects by allowing a broad base of individuals to make equity and debt investments in start-up stage companies.

InfraShares takes the successful model used for crowdfunding investment in commercial real estate development projects and applies it to the development of privately financed public infrastructure and infrastructure-focused start-ups.

Being a CEO of two relatively young companies has left Ross with very little down time to enjoy his hobbies of surfing and snowboarding.

“It’s difficult. Ross Infrastructure Development is my primary business. InfraShares is a start-up just getting off the ground now,” Ross said. “It’s difficult to manage the current clients versus the opportunities with a start-up like InfraShares. On a day-by-day basis, I have to sit down each morning and prioritize what I’m going to get done.”

Ricci Graham



**1.** Brian Ross spent a year in Afghanistan. He said his Army platoon was exposed to a lot of attacks while working on route clearance, searching for Improvised Explosive Devices and overseeing base construction in the country’s most forsaken regions.

**2.** Brian Ross admitted being in Afghanistan was scary, but he also learned “about managing a lot of different responsibilities and managing stress and adversity.” Before completing his time in the Army, Ross received a Bronze Star and was named Engineer Platoon Leader of the Year in 2011.

# Good Samaritan Puts Out Fire On Way to Construction Site

It was just another Tuesday for Todd Covington, a driver for [Bubba's Water Truck Service](#). His usual daily task is to provide dust suppression for a number of Construction Package (CP) 2-3 sites in Fresno, Kings and Tulare counties. Little did he know that his typical day would be a heroic one.

Around 5:45 a.m. during his early morning commute along State Route 43 to high-speed rail's Avenue 88 construction site, Covington noticed smoke along the shoulder of the highway. As he drove closer, he noticed a small car on fire that began to spread onto the grass close by. It was then he leaped into action.

Covington pulled his water truck into the northbound lane, turned on his hazard lights, and used the side spray to extinguish both the car and the grass fire.

Knowing his work shift started at 6 a.m., Covington made sure the fire was out, waved to the other driver and kept going. "I went on about my day," said Covington jokingly in an

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**"What sets us apart is our employees. We have a really good crew of people who take pride in doing their job the best that it can be done."**

**Gina Markos**  
President  
Bubba's Water Truck Service

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interview. "I had to be at work, but I knew it was the right thing to do."

When asked about Covington, Regina (Gina) Markos, president of Bubba's Water Truck, said, "What sets us apart is our employees. We have a really good crew of people who take pride in doing their job the best

that it can be done," said Markos.

Bubba's Water Truck, a certified Microbusiness, began as a sole proprietorship for Gina and Pete Markos in 2012. Now, their two sons have joined the family business.

In 2018, the firm began working on the high-speed rail program and providing dust suppression services to design-build contractor Dragados-Flatiron Joint Venture (DFJV) as a sub-contractor. A year later, Bubba's became a direct vendor.

Since working on high-speed rail, Bubba's, which is based in the Fresno County town of Tollhouse, has expanded their services. Gina ticked off a number of areas where the company has grown. The firm has increased the number of trucks and employees working on high-speed rail. They've purchased a new water truck, flatbed and dump trailers, and now offer dirt hauling services.

Bubba's has also hired seven new employees including Covington, who came to work on June 29. By then, Gina had heard about



1. Since 2018, Bubba's Water Truck Service has helped to keep dust and dirt at high-speed rail construction sites from wafting up and polluting the air in the Central Valley.
2. The microbusiness, based in Tollhouse, was launched in 2012 by Gina Markos and her husband Pete. In addition to dust suppression, they delivered potable water for storage tanks and filled swimming pools. Today, they offer even more services.

some of his exploits. Two years ago, he ran a water truck and helped the clean up after Paradise was ravaged by the Camp Fire, one of the worst wildfires in California's history. He said, "It's sad to see the destruction, but it's a feel-good type of job for me because you're helping these families restart their lives."

Gina added she believes Covington fits right in with her other employees who go out of their way to help others. "At Bubba's, we strive to create the best work environment for our employees and make sure that they know that we appreciate their contributions to making Bubba's stand out."

Augie Blancas

**1.** On his way to work at a high-speed rail construction site, Bubba's Water Truck Services driver Todd Covington saw flames spreading from a vehicle to some grass. He leaped into action and sprayed water out of the side his truck to put out the fire.

**2.** Bubba's Water Truck Service has grown since joining Construction Package 2-3 of the high-speed rail program. The company recently hired seven new workers, purchased several new trucks and has expanded its services. Now, the company hauls tons of dirt used for construction.

**3.** Workers tamp down loads of dirt delivered to a high-speed rail construction site by Bubba's Water Truck Service. The company started out as a subcontractor on the project and is now a direct vendor.

**4.** Loads of steel on board a Bubba's Water Truck Service flatbed trailer await delivery at a high-speed rail construction site in the Central Valley.



# Searching Underground Pays Off Big Time for Growing Small Business

Seven years, several new offices, a series of successes—things have been going well for Joe Valverde and [Valverde Construction, Inc.](#) since being featured in the Authority's Small Business Newsletter in 2014.

For high-speed rail, the company focuses on utility relocation. They are hard at work on a \$38 million subcontract with Tutor Perini/Zachry/Parsons, the high-speed rail design-build team hired to handle the project's initial construction from Madera to Fresno.

It is [delicate work](#)—navigating dense cities and their buried tangle of pipes and tubes carrying water, electricity and gas, high volumes of traffic, busy schedules, various local partners and officials. And all while mitigating impacts to the community and businesses—

“High-speed rail has helped us expand. We have nearly two-and-a-half times the staff because of the project—163 employees total today.”

Joe Valverde

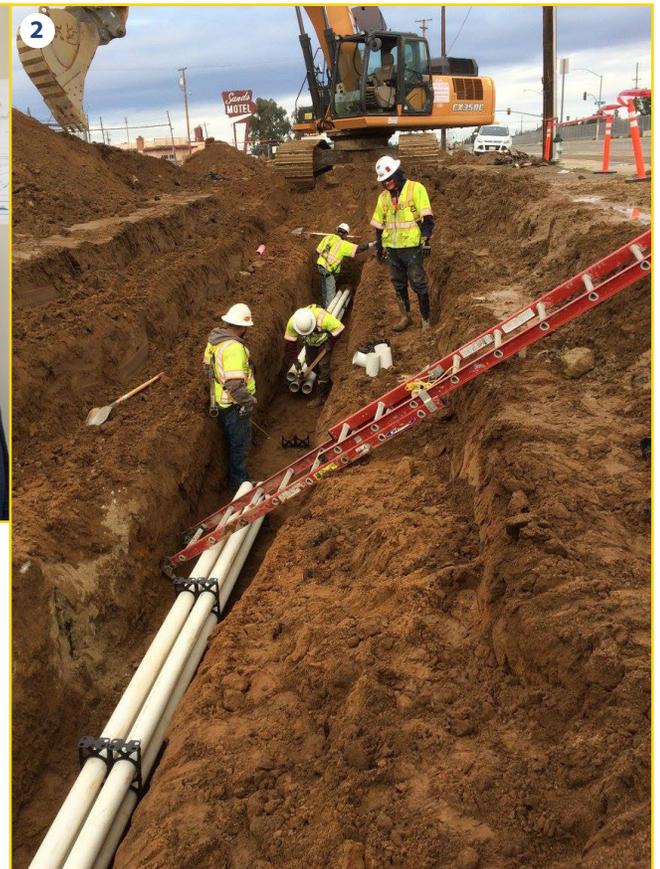
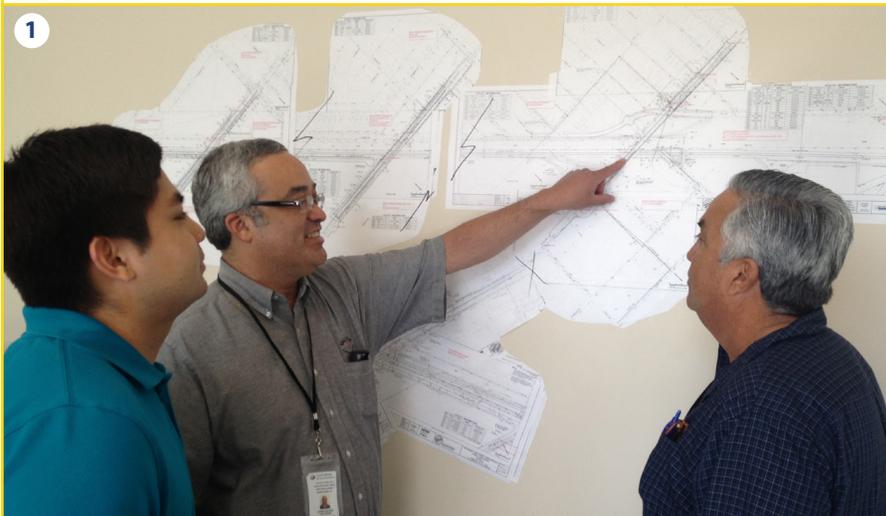
Owner

Valverde Construction, Inc.



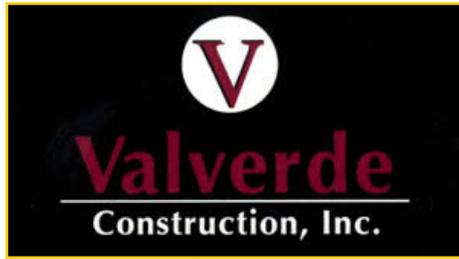
disruptions, debris and discontent. Doing all this “requires extensive preplanning and often night work shifts or weekends to perform the work,” said Valverde.

Company crews spend much of their days [looking underground](#), but everything else is looking up.



1. Before he launched Valverde Construction in 1972, Joe Valverde (right) served in the military and spent some time as a professional boxer. Today, he's very proud that Valverde Construction can be called a family-owned business. His children, including four sons, and grandchildren have joined the engineering and pipeline utility construction firm, based out of Santa Fe Springs.

2. In 2013, Valverde Construction won a \$38 million dollar contract to provide utility relocation for Tutor Perini/Zachary/Parsons, the design-builder for Construction Package 1 of the high-speed rail program. Joe Valverde said navigating dense cities and buried pipes and tubes carrying water, electricity and gas require his crews to work a lot of nights and weekends.



“High-speed rail has helped us expand,” explained Valverde. “We have nearly two-and-a-half times the staff because of the project—163 employees total today.” Two of those employees are veterans of the United States Armed Forces.

Valverde is a native of South Central Los Angeles, and while boxing and the military were his first professional endeavors, his nearly half-century tenure at the helm of his company holds the title.

“It was 1972. I saw an opportunity in the industry and wanted to start my own company,” he said. “And now, we have transportation projects in Los Angeles, San Francisco, and of course the Central Valley.”

Based out of Santa Fe Springs, the Disabled Veteran Business Enterprise (DVBE) has opened additional offices in Los Angeles, Santa Monica, and Fresno. Forty-eight years in business has had its fair share of challenges, but the company has managed to survive thanks to the reputation of hard-working employees.

Asked what he does for fun, Valverde answered with one word, “Work.”

Even with all the years invested, he’s excited for whatever’s next. He noted, “We get to face challenges head on while improving our public infrastructure for current and future generations.”

Speaking of generations, Valverde’s children and grandchildren work for the company. They all take the future seriously,

a perfect match for this project. “The high-speed rail project is a monumental and nationally recognized transportation project which happens to be in our own backyard within the state of California,” Valverde added. “To be a part of the first high-speed rail project in the United States is something we are very proud of.”

Kyle Simerly

**1. & 2.** Removing utilities and putting them in new locations for high-speed rail often require Valverde crews to dig two pits and use machinery to bore a tunnel while shoving a huge pipe between the pits. Lines for sewer, water, oil, gas, electricity and telecommunications can be installed in the pipes.

**3.** In downtown Fresno, workers poured concrete over giant pipes and vaults containing underground utilities. Manhole covers leading up to the surface of the earth will later give maintenance and repair crews access to utilities buried deep below ground.



# 2020 Sustainability Report Highlights Project Benefits, Construction Achievements

The California High-Speed Rail Authority recently released [the 2020 Sustainability Report](#), an annual assessment and update for the planning, construction and operation of the high-speed rail program.

“Our approach to sustainability is to plan and construct in a way that will allow Californians to live a good quality of life for future generations to come,” said Margaret Cederoth, Director of Sustainability and Planning for the Authority. “The environment and climate are important aspects of sustainability, but we also address the social and economic realities that are all part of constructing high-speed rail in California.”

In 2019, industry leaders gave the Authority a GRESB rating of five stars for their sustainable practices. It’s the highest rating we can receive and shows where we stand on a global scale. The Authority is poised for similar

recognition for 2020.

Since construction began in 2015, the Authority has achieved a [97% recycling rate](#) and works through community agreements to balance out all emissions during construction. “Construction projects don’t typically do this,” noted Cederoth. “We have reached a positive carbon balance on our construction sites and are pleased to be reducing carbon now.”

The Sustainability Report also details policies for station planning and running a fully electrified high-speed rail system on [100% renewable energy](#). Stations and operations and maintenance facilities will achieve net positive energy consumption by supplying 105% of the project’s energy. This will not only run trains, but also add energy storage that can be used during power outages.

“The Authority is committed to building

“The Authority is committed to building the greenest infrastructure project in the nation, both in construction and operations.”

Margaret Cederoth  
Director of Sustainability and Planning  
High-Speed Rail Authority

the greenest infrastructure project in the nation, both in construction and operations,” Cederoth said. “It supports California’s vision of building a green, sustainable and equitable transit system for all.”

Yaqeline Castro



1. A water truck sprays concrete that crews removed from a high-speed rail construction site in Fresno and transported to a recycling yard. The Authority has achieved a 97% recycling rate and uses community agreements to balance out construction emissions.

2. Last year, more than 100 volunteers gathered for a tree planting in Glendale’s Verdugo Park. The trees are part of the Authority’s urban forestry program, which will help offset greenhouse gas emissions associated with construction.

3. High-speed rail uses the cleanest equipment available. Ninety-nine percent of off-road equipment hours in 2020 have been with Tier 3 or Tier 4 equipment. Ninety-four percent of hours have been solely with Tier 4 equipment.

\*Some photos taken prior to COVID-19 social distancing requirements

# I Will Ride Gets Back on Track

The California High-Speed Rail Authority has relaunched **I Will Ride**, the student education and outreach initiative designed to inform, engage and connect college students to the high-speed rail program. Through the program, students and young professionals have participated in construction tours, webinars and networking sessions with Authority staff. I Will Ride has also aided students' career aspirations by making sure they're aware of student internships offered by small businesses working on high-speed rail.

COVID-19 has kept students away from each other and changed the way they socialize, learn and prepare for their careers. In the coming months, I Will Ride will help keep students safe while focusing on educational and networking events that can be held online in collaboration with colleges and universities.

The first event will be on November 18, when the Authority hosts a student kick-off webinar on Zoom from 1:00 p.m. to 2:00 p.m. Anyone who's interested can register at [https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN\\_leCy5ieiTG-ghAHJPdb77Q](https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_leCy5ieiTG-ghAHJPdb77Q).

The student-run initiative was started in the Central Valley by individuals who believed in the development of high-speed rail in California. Local I Will Ride chapters were established at several college campuses including UC Merced, Fresno State, Fresno City College and UC Berkeley. Since then, the Authority has welcomed hundreds of college and university students on construction tours in the Central Valley as part of I Will Ride Day and has engaged in numerous outreach events, including classroom presentations, workshops and connecting students to high-speed rail professionals.

Students interested in I Will Ride can get more information on the I Will Ride page at <https://hsr.ca.gov/iwillride/>

If your local business has any student opportunities that you would like to promote through I Will Ride monthly emails or webinars, you can email [iwillride@hsr.ca.gov](mailto:iwillride@hsr.ca.gov) with details and a short description.

Yaqeline Castro



1. Public Information Officer Toni Tinoco talks to eager participants who flocked to Fresno for I Will Ride Day in October 2019. Tinoco updated listeners about progress on the high-speed rail project and what they can do to support the project.

2. The I Will Ride chapter at California State University, San Jose hosted an event and are a part of the student movement, which is excited about learning about and exploring transportation technology and an investment in mobility for future generations.

\*Photos taken prior to COVID-19 social distancing requirements



3. & 4. About three dozen students and young professionals went on a tour and saw high-speed rail construction up close and personal in the Central Valley. They heard from engineers who discussed the challenges of building the first high-speed rail in the nation.

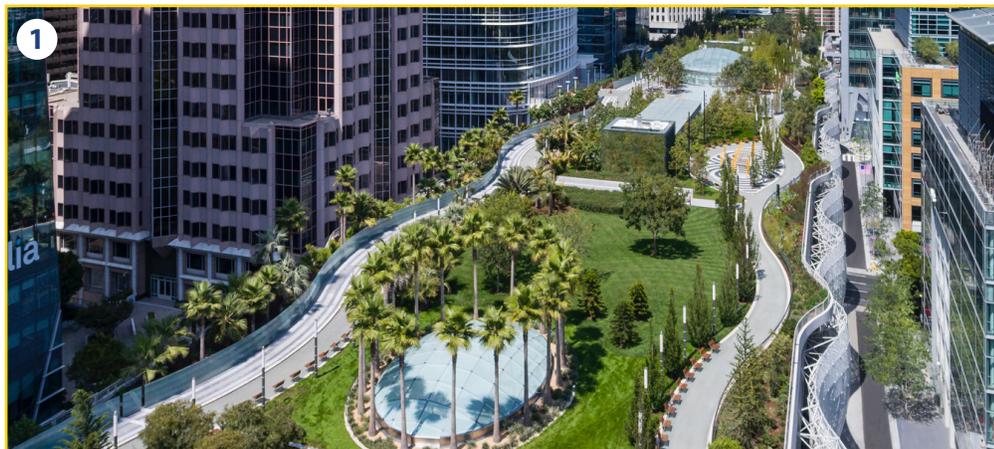
# Work Continues on Environmental Clearance Amidst COVID-19 Crisis

The California High-Speed Rail Authority continues its march to environmentally clear all of Phase 1 of the high-speed rail project from San Francisco to Los Angeles/Anaheim.

Work in the Central Valley took a giant step forward when the Authority's Board of Directors approved the [Final Supplemental Environmental Impact Report/Environmental Impact Statement \(EIR/EIS\)](#) for the project section known as the [Central Valley Wye](#). It's where high-speed trains coming from Fresno and Merced will turn west to travel to San Jose and the San Francisco Bay Area.

The Board's action agreed that State Route 152 (North) to Road 11 Wye is the preferred alignment. It means full environmental clearance for 171 miles of high-speed rail between Merced and Bakersfield, the section that will serve as a test track.

Since last February, staff members have been hosting public meetings to finish environmental documents for high-speed rail sections from San Francisco to Merced and Palmdale to Los Angeles/Anaheim. When the COVID-19 pandemic reared its ugly head, we continued our ambitious schedule and started holding environmental community meetings online.



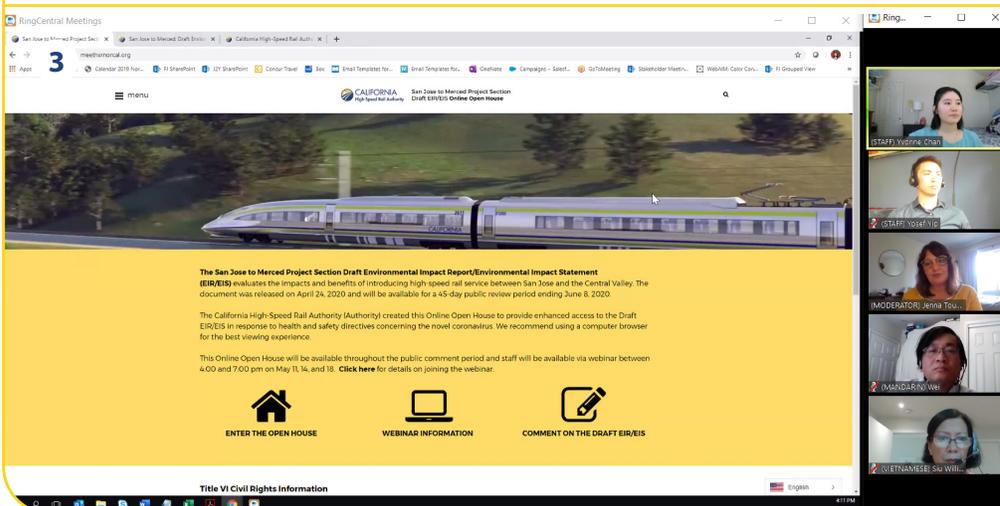
In Northern California, the public comment period for the 51-mile [San Francisco to San Jose project section](#) closed in September. It calls for Caltrain and high-speed rail to share tracks along the corridor. We also worked on the [San Jose to Merced Draft EIR/EIS document](#). That route will travel from San Jose through the Pacheco Pass to the Central Valley Wye and link the Central Valley to the Silicon Valley. Environmental clearance for both sections is scheduled for completion next year.

In Southern California, we issued environmental documents for two project sections - [Bakersfield to Palmdale](#), which goes from the Central Valley to Los Angeles County, and [Burbank to Los Angeles](#), a 14-mile stretch that ends at LA Union Station. We held a vir-



tual meeting to discuss alternatives designed to reduce impacts to aquatic resources in [Palmdale to Burbank](#), which connects the Antelope Valley to the Los Angeles Basin. We plan to environmentally clear those sections along with [LA to Anaheim](#) by 2022.

Karen Massie



1. Starting at the Salesforce Transit Center, the San Francisco to San Jose project section will feature blended service with Caltrain and high-speed rail sharing tracks. (Photo by Pelli Clarke, Pelli Architects, courtesy of the Transbay Joint Powers Authority)
2. During a community meeting broadcast online, regional consultant Genoveva Arellano explains features for the 14-mile Burbank to Los Angeles project section. The section stretches from Hollywood Burbank Airport to Los Angeles Union Station.
3. About 30 to 40 people tuned in to a virtual open house to hear about the San Jose to Merced project section. The 84-mile section will travel from Diridon Station in downtown San Jose, through the Pacheco Pass and end at the western limits of the Central Valley Wye.

# Veteran Brings Virtual Connections From Battlefield to Business Field

He wanted to be a soldier at a very early age and loved to play with toy soldiers and G.I. Joes and imitate his father, a former Marine. When Erik Holguin grew a bit older, he joined the Cub Scouts and Boy Scouts, and later as an adult, he was inspired to join the Army.

Holguin enjoyed his training and service as a communications expert in wartime situations. During Desert Storm in Iraq, he was part of a tactical unit that provided wireless communications networks for fellow troops in the battlefield. His communications team extensively rehearsed and planned the setup of their extensive network equipment. He recalled, "When the call came to go out, we were ready to execute our orders."

Today, Holguin owns [EM Link International](#), a business that helps businesses and clients with virtual communications. He uses the same systematic preparation he experienced in the Army to create on-the-spot communications for his clients.

Holguin and his technical team work behind the scenes with businesses and agencies

"When the call came to go out, we were ready to execute our orders."

**Erik Holguin**  
Owner  
EM Link International

like the California High-Speed Rail Authority to hold virtual public meetings with hundreds of people tuning in to the gathering online. Coordinating everything takes laser-sharp focus. Holguin said, "I feel the same satisfaction in civilian life as I did in Iraq when I see the networking system functioning smoothly and everyone is connected."

He also likes to educate clients and help them understand how to harness technical communication networks for more efficient remote communications. Erik explained, "I remember one instructor taught me that communications is all about signal flow. If you know where the signal flows, you can always



em link international  
simplified communications

troubleshoot problems."

Holguin added that he enjoys watching his company connecting people and keeping them safe during this unprecedented time of COVID-19, which requires so many businesses and clients to work remotely.

Rachel Kesting

**1.** Erik Holguin was part of a U.S. Army tactical unit that provided wireless communications networks for fellow troops during Desert Storm in Iraq. As the owner of EM Link International, he called on his military experience to help clients with virtual communications. He's been especially busy since the COVID-19 pandemic began.

**2.** Holguin has played a major role in virtual public meetings hosted by the California High-Speed Rail Authority. Hundreds of people tuned in to get information on environmental documents for high-speed rail project sections in Southern California.



# Construction Crews Churn Out Work on High-Speed Rail

As the country celebrated Labor Day and the American worker, the California High-Speed Rail Authority was cheering on its construction workers. The [high-speed rail project is now averaging a daily record of nearly 1,100 workers](#) dispatched to construction sites throughout the Central Valley.

"It's neat to be part of one of the biggest projects in California," said Nicholas Godbey, a laborer working on an overpass at Davis Avenue in Fresno County. "I work with great people every day and I take a lot of pride in being a laborer. There's not many who can say they are part of building high-speed rail."

Godbey also pointed to a sticker he crafted for his hardhat and his co-workers. The word 'essential' was emblazoned across a hammer and shovel because the government has deemed construction work as essential during COVID-19.

"The Authority is proud to keep hardworking men and women on the job and in the

**"The Authority is proud to keep hardworking men and women on the job and in the field during this worldwide pandemic."**

**Brian Kelly**  
CEO  
High-Speed Rail Authority

field during this worldwide pandemic," said Authority CEO Brian Kelly. "These individuals are more than 'essential.' Each day, these skilled workers are out building for California and the nation's future, and their contribution is invaluable."

At the South Avenue grade separation,

[crane operator Christina Cunningham](#) was running a 90-ton forklift as girders were lowered into position. The former hospice nurse said when she got into construction it made her grandfather, who also operated cranes, very happy. "He would call all my aunts and uncles and say 'My granddaughter is doing cranes,'" she laughed.

Cunningham has a son, who is a Marine, and two girls still living at home. "They get to see this. It's a sense of pride," she said. "Instead of watching people die and help them transition, I get to build something and bring something to life."

The Authority has worked to ensure high-speed rail jobs benefit disadvantaged areas through the Community Benefits Agreement. It includes a Targeted Worker Program that requires 30 percent of all project work hours be performed by individuals who come from disadvantaged communities where household income ranges from \$32,000 to \$40,000 annually.



**1.** Crane operator Christina Cunningham was a hospice nurse before she made the jump to construction. She said working on high-speed rail gives her and her children a sense of pride. "Instead of watching people die, I get to build something and bring something to life."

**2.** Second-year apprentice Abraham Fernandez Martinez is working at the Davis Avenue overcrossing helping crews put retaining walls in place. He pointed out high-speed rail is helping him and others provide for themselves during the COVID-19 crisis.

“A lot of people are in quarantine.  
I’m grateful to be working during  
this time.”

Abraham Fernandez Martinez  
Second Year Apprentice  
High-Speed Rail Construction Worker

The National Targeted Worker Program is contributing to the Central Valley’s economy. Out of the more than 4,500 workers dispatched to the project, 226 said they live in Madera County, 1,791 in Fresno County, 128 in Kings County, 406 in Tulare County, and 580 in Kern County.

Second-year apprentice Abraham Fernandez Martinez hails from the Tulare County town of Farmersville. He’s working at the Davis Avenue grade separation in Fresno County where crews are installing mechanically stabilized earth retaining walls and backfilling the walls with tons of dirt. Martinez expressed thanks that high-speed rail is helping people provide for themselves during tough times. “A lot of people are in quarantine,” he said. “I’m grateful to be working during this time. It helps me escape from COVID-19.”

Karen Massie/Toni Tinoco

**1.** Laborer Nicholas Godbey is proud to be working on high-speed rail. He and his crew members are wearing stickers on their hardhats that Godbey made with the word “essential” emblazoned across a hammer and shovel.

**2.** Workers relocating telecommunication lines west of downtown Fresno have helped high-speed rail reach a new milestone. Currently, an average of 1,100 workers are dispatched every day to about three dozen construction sites in the Central Valley.

**3.** In August, ironworkers assembled rebar cages to form columns at the Conejo Viaduct west of State Route 43 in Fresno County. The rebar cages were then lifted and put in place to provide support for the structure.



# New Training Center Helps Workers Hop Aboard High-Speed Rail Project

What's the difference between a job and career? A quote attributed to Chinese philosopher Confucius sums it up best.

"Choose a job you love, and you will never have to work a day in your life."

For the inaugural class at the new **Central Valley Training Center (CVTC)**, working on the high-speed rail will not be just another job, but a chance to be trailblazers.

"This is a big part of history and we're leading the way for everyone to have an opportunity with such a great project," said Arturo Garza of Selma. He signed up for training after hearing about it from his brother. Originally interested in becoming a plumber, Garza is excited to learn about the all the different trades covered in the program.

Located in Selma, the center provides pre-apprenticeship classes and hands-on construction industry training for Central Valley residents who want to work on the nation's

first high-speed rail project. Classes are especially aimed at veterans, at-risk young adults, and minority and low-income populations in the counties of Fresno, Kings, Tulare, Kern, Madera and Merced.

The center welcomed 30 students on October 5. The 16-week program kicked off with soft skill lessons like active listening and teamwork. Students underwent physical training so they could experience the challenges of working on a construction site. One exercise included the Laborers Union Agility Assessment which includes safely moving and restacking 45 cinderblocks 30 feet in under seven minutes.

"If the boys can do it, I can do it," exclaimed Erica Lopez of Laton after she finished the assessment on her first day. She's interested in becoming a welder. "I want to show that women can do it, but I also want to show my sons that mom can do it, too."

After six weeks, students will be exposed to more than 10 different trades and innovative training to become a future bricklayer, iron worker, plumber, cement mason or electrician.

Since the center's grand opening, more than 150 applicants have inquired about the program and being part of the next cohort.

"This is a great start for the future to get into the building trades," said Chuck Riojas, Executive Director of the Fresno, Madera, Tulare, Kings Building Trades Council. "16 weeks is a real commitment for these students, but it shows a commitment to the trades, to the community and to themselves.

"Four months isn't much of a sacrifice considering the victory in the end," added Garza.

To learn more about the Central Valley Training Center, visit <https://cvtcprogram.com/>

Augie Blancas



**1.** Authority Board member Henry Perea (fourth from right) attended the ribbon cutting in October for the grand opening of the Central Valley Training Center in Selma. The center welcomed 30 students when it opened. There's already a waiting list for classes. More than 150 people have inquired about the program and being part of the next cohort.

**2.** Members of the Building Trades Council for Fresno, Madera, Tulare, Kings Counties and other dignitaries got a chance to see what class members are learning at the new training center. The program will expose students to 10 trades. They will be able to take tests and join unions where they'll find work as cement masons, electricians, plumbers and pipefitters, iron workers, welders and laborers.

# First High-Speed Rail Structure Completed in Kern County

High-speed rail crews reached another major milestone when they finished the [Poso Creek Viaduct](#) in October. It is the first completed structure in Construction Package 4, a high-speed rail segment that stretches 22 miles from the Tulare-Kern county line to Poplar Avenue in Kern County.

During construction, crews followed strict guidelines and preventive measures to protect Poso Creek. They installed silt fencing and fiber rolls along the creek bed and safely diverted wildlife from the construction zone with exclusionary fencing.

“Our goal is to deliver the greenest infrastructure project in the nation, and we’re doing that by protecting our natural resources and important habitats like Poso Creek,”

said Garth Fernandez, interim Central Valley Regional Director. “Thanks to the hard work of our crews and through effective mitigation efforts, we were able to complete this project and restore the environmental footprint to its original state.”

The Poso Creek Viaduct is located south of Blankenship Avenue and west of State Route 43 just north of the City of Wasco. It will eventually carry high-speed rail trains over Poso Creek.

In August and September, three structures that are part of Construction Package 1 in Madera County opened to traffic, including grade separations at [Avenue 10](#), [Avenue 15](#) and [Avenue 7](#).

Toni Tinoco/Karen Massie



**1. & 2.** What a difference three months makes. In August, crews were pouring concrete for the decks and walls of the Poso Creek Viaduct. Now it's the first completed high-speed rail structure in Construction Package 4 in Kern County. Located west of SR 43, it will carry trains over Poso Creek.

**3.** Avenue 10 was opened to traffic in Madera County in September. Grade separations will eliminate cars and trucks idling as they wait for high-speed rail trains to pass.

**4.** Avenue 15 near State route 99 in Madera County will eventually allow traffic to travel over the existing BNSF railroad tracks and future high-speed rail tracks.

**5.** Avenue 7 is one of nine grade separations in Madera County. Crews opened the structure to traffic last month. Work on the overpass included straightening out a bend in the road and realigning Road 33, which travels underneath the structure. The overpass will allow traffic to travel over the future high-speed rail line.



# Caltrans Mentoring Program Gives Small Businesses a Leg Up



“Caltrans was a good learning ground because there are so many different areas you can work in,” said Lori Goodwin. After 18 years in project development, construction administration and a field office at the California Department of Transportation, Goodwin made her move to the private industry in 2007 and never looked back.

Today, Goodwin is Vice President of Civil Program Management at [NV5](#), a company that provides engineering and construction management services to clients. She also heads the steering committee for [Central Region CalMentor Program](#), an architectural and engineering mentor-protégé program designed to increase the number of small businesses participating in transportation projects.

According to Goodwin, “Almost every single contract that comes out, whether it’s Caltrans, high-speed rail or another state agency, is going to have a small business SB goal. It’s truly a partnership. We need each other.”

“Caltrans supports the CalMentor Program in the Central Valley and throughout the state,” said Caltrans Supervising Transportation Engineer Rory Quince, who sits on the steering committee with Goodwin. He explained, “We have meetings, workshops and bring in speakers to assist small businesses. Most importantly, small business owners can network and build relationships that will give them more opportunities to be successful.”

Goodwin’s company, NV5, is providing construction management on the high-speed rail project and mentoring small businesses. She’s

“Almost every single contract that comes out, whether it’s Caltrans, high-speed rail or another state agency, is going to have a small business goal. It’s truly a partnership. We need each other.”

Lori Goodwin  
Vice President of Civil Program Management  
NV5

watched her small business protégés grow. “It can be a challenge submitting your proposal and going through the interview process,” Goodwin explained. “I look over proposals they’ve submitted in the past. I make sure they can get through financial negotiations and the audit that they face on a big Caltrans contract.”

When she began tutoring San Jose-based [Achievement Engineering Corporation \(AEC\)](#), the firm had already written regulations for and was providing quality assurance testing and inspections for the high-speed rail program. The company was also hungry for more work. AEC Business Developer Zachary Johnston said NV5 and AEC are talking about teaming up to bid on the [Veterans Boulevard Interchange Project in Fresno](#), a six-lane road that includes grade separations for State Route 99, Union Pacific Railroad and high-speed rail.

“She’s always there to answer questions,” Johnston explained. “She’s opening doors and connecting us with more projects and



Lori Goodwin (second from right) is an executive for NV5, an engineering and construction management firm. She also heads the Central Region CalMentor Program and makes sure small businesses learn how to navigate the procurement process for Caltrans.

# N|V|5

bigger companies. They're finding out we may be small, but we do grade-A work. We have the staff and good communication with customers, which sometimes enables us to finish projects faster than others." Johnson added that he looks forward to graduating from the CalMentor program and plans to pay it forward by mentoring another small business.

Goodwin said online meetings have allowed CalMentor to keep momentum going during the COVID-19 pandemic. Her team is already planning next year's schedule. "Small businesses are an integral part of what Caltrans and other government agencies do. We've got to have firms in the pipeline to help everyone meet and exceed their small business goals and get work done for the state of California."

Karen Massie



1. According to Caltrans engineer Rory Quince, networking is key to understanding how to win a Caltrans contract. Quince said building relationships helps gives companies more opportunities to be successful.
2. Achievement Engineering Corporation (AEC) is a CalMentor protégé. When it joined the program, it was already providing quality assurance testing and conducting inspections for the high-speed rail project.
3. Business Developer Zachary Johnston works out of AEC's Fresno office. He joined CalMentor and Lori Goodwin and her company, NV5, are serving as his mentor. Johnston said the relationship is paying off. His company is talking about teaming up with NV5 to work on the Veterans Boulevard Interchange Project in Fresno.



**LATEST VIDEOS: [WWW.YOUTUBE.COM/CAHIGHSPEEDRAIL](http://WWW.YOUTUBE.COM/CAHIGHSPEEDRAIL)**



### Cedar Viaduct, South Fresno

Crews shut down State Route 99 (SR 99) overnight to place the last two precast girders to form the superstructure of the Cedar Viaduct. During the day, ironworkers are tying rebar for edge beams. When complete, the viaduct will be nearly 3,700 feet long and will carry trains over SR 99, North and Cedar Avenues and Golden State Boulevard.



## Interested in doing business with High-Speed Rail?

Visit [www.ConnectHSR.com](http://www.ConnectHSR.com)



### SMALL BUSINESS PARTICIPATION

AS OF OCTOBER 2020

**570** Certified Small Businesses working on the high-speed rail program statewide

**181** Certified Disadvantaged Business Enterprises  
**60** Certified Disabled Veteran Business Enterprises

**NORTHERN CALIFORNIA:**  
**201** Certified Small Businesses

**CENTRAL VALLEY:**  
**176** Certified Small Businesses

**SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA:**  
**177** Certified Small Businesses

**OUTSIDE OF CALIFORNIA:**  
**16** Certified Small Businesses

